

BRISTOL TOWNSHIP

Red Cross shelter

The federal funds account for nearly a quarter of the shelter's \$1.1 million budget.

By JO CIAVAGLIA
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Amber Sanchez heard that a congressman was coming to see where she lived and he had a big surprise. The 13-year-old knows congressmen are important people. They work in Washington, D.C. They help the president run the world.

So she dressed up in her leopard-print shirt and a black skirt with the matching

leopard-print hem. Clipped a gold bow pin to her shirt. A smudge of orange lipstick clung to her lips.

It's not every day that someone like Bucks County Congressman Jim Greenwood, R-8, visits the Red Cross Homeless Shelter. So not long after Greenwood arrived yesterday, Amber turned tour guide, leading him and a half-dozen other suit-and-tie dignitaries through her home. She hasn't lived here long, but already knows the place well.

She showed him the playroom where she and other kids build one-room houses using the interlocking block mats. She showed him

granted \$200,000

the library, where the kids play card games, and one of the five new computers there.

Greenwood saw her bedroom, too — three Army-style cots pushed together in the open dormitory. Amber sleeps in the middle one between her mother and big sister. Amber's cot is covered with a peach-color sheet and a striped pillow. Her shoes are tucked neatly underneath.

No, she told Greenwood, the babies crying at night don't bother her. She's used to it since she has a baby sister who lives with her dad.

Amber and her family came to the Bristol Township shelter almost two weeks ago. Before that they lived with family near-

by Amber moves a lot, she's attended eight different schools, but this is the first time she has lived in a homeless shelter.

"Are you OK here?" Greenwood asked.

"Yeah, I made a lot of friends."

As of yesterday, 70 people lived at the shelter, more than half children, in a space about the size of three Levittown homes. Most were at their jobs during the congressman's visit. The waiting list for a bed is six to eight weeks, assistant director Kristi Dennis said. Since families with kids

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get priority, people without children must wait.

"That's tough," Greenwood said.

This time of year, the shelter usually accepts up to 85 people, but budget cuts forced them to reduce beds and lay off staff. Residents without children typically stay three to six months; families stay six to 12 months because that's how long it takes to get a Section 8 federal subsidized housing certificate.

"It's that long," Greenwood said. "Wow!"

Yesterday's shelter tour was the second that the longtime congressman has made

of Bucks' only 24-hour, full-service homeless shelter. His first visit was last April, when he learned about the financial plight the shelter and its residents face with cuts in government and private funding, declining donations and increased competition for available funds.

After his latest tour, Greenwood stood in the shelter's play area to announce he secured \$200,000 in federal grant money for the shelter. The money represents nearly a quarter of the shelter's annual \$1.1 million budget.

The funds will cover three critical shelter programs affected by cuts:

\$200,000 federal grant

■ An intensive case management program that works with clients to resolve behaviors that led them to homelessness to help them become self-sufficient, Dennis said. About 10 percent to 12 percent of the more than 200 adults who stay at the shelter each year return.

■ A transportation program, which will allow the shelter to hire more drivers to transport residents to and from jobs and other appointments. The services used to be available 24 hours a day; now they are available only until 11 p.m., which hurts third-shift workers.

■ Additional mental health counseling for residents. Dennis estimated that 90 percent

of residents have mental health issues.

Amber didn't completely understand what the congressman did in getting the funding. In school, she was just starting to learn about what congressmen do, when she had to leave. But the chance to meet someone like Greenwood was still exciting, Amber added.

"I've never met someone from D.C. before," she said.

Greenwood represents the residents of Bucks County, some districts of Abington, Upper Dublin and Upper Merion in Montgomery County and two wards in Philadelphia.

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